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Black Fathers' Participation in Early Childhood Development in South Africa: What Do We Know?

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ABSTRACT This paper draws from an ongoing exploratory qualitative study, which uses semi-structured interviews to investigate the views of fathers about strategies to encourage men's participation in early childhood education in one of the townships in the Eastern Cape Province. The study aims to contribute to knowledge about fathers' participation in early childhood education in general and on the participation of black fathers in particular. Informed by Uriel Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, the literature review explores the current state of fathers' participation during the early beginning of the child; barriers to sustained fathers' participation; and current strategies in place to encourage sustainable and meaningful father participation in the early education of their children. This paper argues that what is currently known about black fathers' participation in the early education of their children is grossly inadequate. Given limited information on Black fathers' participation in the education of their children in South Africa, this paper concludes that more research on Black fathers and their participation in early education of children is therefore required. Some implications for research and policy are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Research evidences abound to suggest that the fathers' participation in the early childhood development (ECD) can positively affect their children's education and social development. However, the ECD sector in South Africa has been experiencing numerous difficulties in attracting and increasing the involvement of (Black) fathers to actively participate in various ECD initiatives (WHO 2007; Khewu and Adu 2015; Mashiya et al. 2015). Traditionally, the responsibility of caring and raising children in most South African societies has been left largely in the hands of women (Cassirer and Addati 2007; Mashego and Taruvinga 2014; Seward 2014). This was largely due to lack of employment opportunities for women in the industrial and professional business sectors (Sullivan 2000; Mashiya et al. 2015). Since men dominated much of the formal economy, and some would argue that is still the case, women engaged in unpaid work such as cooking, cleaning and raising children (Cassirer and Addati 2007; Izugbara et al. 2014).

Literature suggests that there have been changes within the formal economy where large numbers of women around the world have chosen to enter the formal economic sector as a result of their improvement in education, business, politics and employment (Sullivan 2000; Ratele et al. 2012; Koenig-Visagie et al. 2013; Izugbara et al. 2014). As a result, women are no longer being since as only caretakers but also as providers and breadwinners within the household (Crompton and Geran 1995; Meisenbach 2010; Quinn 2014; Khewu and Adu 2015). Numerous sources reviewed in the course of the current study suggest that factors influencing such changes include movement of women into the workforce, gender equality legislations and feminist ideologies and movements that necessitate a redefinition of gender-roles and parenthood (Richter 2006; Richter et al. 2010; Richter et al. 2012; April and Soomar 2013; Mhongo and Budlender 2013; Mashiya et al. 2015).

Within the industrialised nations such changes in women/men dichotomy have also necessitated the need to reconceptualise fatherhood thereby redefining role of a fathers (Sullivan 2000; Marcisz 2013; Seward 2014; Mashiya et al. 2015). Moreover, numerous studies on fatherhood have emphasised the need to invest fathers given the benefits of having involved fathers in the early beginnings of the affected children (Fagan 1999; Fletcher 2008 McWayne and Campos 2010; Khewu and Adu 2015; Mashiya et al. 2015). As a result, childcare is no longer perceived as the exclusive domestic responsi-

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bility of the women (Richter and Smith 2006; Meisenbach 2010; Richter et al. 2010; Quinn 2014). Notwithstanding these changes, it would appear very doubtful given the dearth of empirical evidence whether South African fathers have become more involved in those areas that are traditionally exclusive to women. On the other hand, research report that fathers absence is rife within the South African communities (Richter 2006; Richter et al. 2010; Richter et al. 2012; Khewu and Adu 2015; Okeke et al. 2015).

Studies indicate that Black fathers more than any other race in South Africa, are more likely to be absence in the lives of their children (Richter et al. 2010; Richter et al. 2012; April and Soomar 2013). Studies also indicate that Black children than any other race are more likely to be without their biological or any father figure during their early years (Richter 2006; Richter and Smith 2006; Khewu and Adu 2015; Mashiya et al. 2015). Therefore, by specifically researching Black fathers, the researchers aim to provide empirical knowledge on ways to better strengthen fathers' participation in their children's early education.

The Concept of Father and Fatherhood

In most sub-Saharan African communities a father is viewed as an intercessor between the ancestors and his family (Mkhize 2004). According to Mkhize (2004), a father is perceived within the traditional society as a provider, a protector and as a family head. At the same time, a father is perceived as one closest to *Qamata* (meaning God). However, it would appear that African perspectives on fatherhood continue to undergo changes largely due to what Ratele et al. (2012) refer to as urbanisation and (Western) education. It must be noted that fatherhood is conceptualised mainly within the Western tradition as the framework of a biological connection between a father and his child where a father and or a father figure is located within the context of a nuclear family (Sullivan 2000; WHO 2007; Seward 2014). However, this conceptualisation appears incongruence with the conceptualisation of a father within the African communities where includes the nuclear but also encompasses the family ties in a traditional extended family (Mkhize 2004; Lesejane 2006; Khewu and Adu 2015; Mashiya et al. 2015). Fatherhood in African context therefore is not defined within the frame of the biological father. Both Mkhize (2004) and Richter et al. (2010) note that fathering is a shared responsibility of males within the extended family. This conceptualisation includes not only the child's father but also his/her maternal and paternal uncles and brothers within the family line; sometimes adult males within the larger immediate communities. In the absence of the biological father, these significant others often assume the responsibilities of looking after the African child (Ratele et al. 2012; Lesejane 2006).

The above description is the reason why Mkhize (2004: 5) noted that "one's father's brother is also one's father…and is expected to behave in a manner deserving of a father". Also Mkhize (2004: 5) notes that in the African extended family "children do not belong to their biological parents: other family members are expected to take an active responsibility for the wellbeing of their relatives' children". Thus, a Eurocentric conceptualisation of family constellation that reduce fatherhood in a nuclear family are insufficient to illuminate the complex assemblage of fatherhood particularly within the South African context. A view by Mkhize (2004) that is shared by Lesejane (2006) is that fatherhood is less of a biological connection, instead the concept appear to be more of a social responsibility that mainly adult males within the proximal communities of the child are expected to assume albeit voluntarily.

Father Participation

Researchers have acknowledged the difficulties therein in defining and measuring father participation in early childhood (Fagan 1999; Campos 2008; Harries 2010). This difficulty appears to be worsened by the complexities of the numerous cultural idiosyncrasies within African societies. (Lamb et al. 1987; Rabe 2006; Swartz and Bhana 2009; Mashiya et al. 2015). A notable contribution in the conceptualization of father participation is a three-part "theoretical model of father participation which defines three critical dimensions that must be present for successful fathering" (Waliser et al. 2002: 137). Although this model serves the immediate purpose for defining and measuring father participation, however, it falls short of considering the qualitative side of father involvement. One case in point relates to the measuring of the amount of time a father spends with his child, where according to McWayne et al. (2013) more empha-

sis should be placed on the nature of the activities and the quality of engagements between a father and his child.

Finley and Schwartz (2004: 144) concur that "it has become clear that time-based measures are very poor proxies of fathers' impact on children's lives, particularly for non-residential fathers". Therefore, the major shortfall in Lamb et al. (1987) model of father involvement is the overemphasis on physical presence of a father that tends to sideline those fathers who do not live with their children but are considered involved and caring, especially by their families. Campos (2008: 137) advises against an "oversimplified dichotomy of 'present' versus 'not present' (in favour) of the notion of father involvement as a multidimensional construct". It would therefore appear that father participation is a more complex phenomenon than just a simple measurement of what fathers do or should do, and how long they should or not do it. Given these self-evidenced complexities, it is therefore imperative for researchers venturing into fatherhood research to employ methodological approaches that seek thorough understanding of father involvement in order to obtain qualitative empirical data that shed light on what counts as meaningful father participation from fathers themselves.

Theoretical Framework

The African conceptual framework on father participation is complex. According to this perspective, fatherhood encapsulates a wide range of male persons within an extended family, even if they are not biological fathers. Shifting socio-cultural and socioeconomic spaces such as the ever-increasing number of women in the workplace who also play the breadwinner role in their families, a role traditionally attributed to men, necessitate re-conceptualisation of this framework. Such developments require broad theoretical frameworks that take into account the broader socio-cultural and socioeconomic contexts within which fatherhood occurs. Therefore, the current study influencing this paper is conceptualised in terms of Bronfenbrenner's (1979a) ecological systems theory, which highlights the role of socio-cultural and socioeconomic factors on human development.

Human development according to the ecological systems model, is influenced by social factors, which are classified into five layers which (Bronfenbrenner 1979a). In the first lay is the micro-systems, which is followed by the meso-systems. The third layer is the exo-systems while the macro-systems represents the fourth. The fifth lay is the chronosystems (Bronfenbrenner 1979a). The child's immediate environment and all members in such environment as the home, the school, and the church together refer to as the micro-system. This level also include influences from the workplace as well as the child's immediate material conditions as poverty, living with both parents, and parent's socioeconomic status. Children and parents interact directly with elements of the micro-system and there is a direct bi-directional impact. For example, a poor family background (element of the micro-system) has a direct negative impact on children's school outcomes (Coleman 1988; Mashego and Taruvinga 2014). Conversely, the poor background can be a motivation to study hard and achieve in school in order to change one's family living conditions (Mokhele 2013). Hence the impact of the micro-system is bi-directional.

The meso-system refers to relationships between micro-systems such as the relationship between home and school (Bronfenbrenner 1979b). Transactions taking place in the 'meso-system' also have a direct impact on fathers and their children. For example, studies show that two-way communication between home and school yields positive academic outcomes for children (Epstein 1983; Fagan 1999; Okeke 2014). The 'exo-system' refers to transactions taking place in a person's immediate environment without necessarily involving the person. For example, fathers who have to spend long hours at the workplace find little time to interact with their children. Elements of the exo-system such as parents' workplace demands can have an indirect negative impact on father participation in early childhood development.

Macro-systems refer to events that take place in distant environments but have consequences for the person's immediate environment. Culture, politics, belief systems, economy are some of the elements of the macro-system that in some instances dictate the amount and quality of attention children receive from their parents, particularly their fathers. On the other hand, the chrono-systems encompass how the elements of timing and changes within the family may impact the wellbeing of the child. The chrono-systems refer to the timing of events that relate to the child (Bronfenbrenner 1979a). Some examples of how the chrono-systems may im-

pact the wellbeing of the child relate to the timing of the retirement, or even the timing of the death of the child's father.

While all five layers of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model have impacts on father participation during early childhood development, however, the present paper is mainly influenced by the elements of the micro-systems. It is imperative to focus on this layer because fathering, childhood development and schooling mainly take place within the elements of the micro-systems. The micro-system itself is a massive area comprising a large gamut of other elements. Within the micro-systems, Bronfenbrenner (1979) refers to the proximal processes that enables the child to interact with the significant other. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that the quality and nature of the interaction depends hugely on the content and structure of the microsystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) also notes that the interaction will have to occur on a fairly more regular basis over extended periods of time in order for such interaction to be very effective. In this analysis, the evolving human organism is the child, the persons are the parents (specifically fathers) and the immediate environment is the home and school. The current paper therefore conceptualises father participation in early childhood education in terms of proximal processes taking place between fathers and children (bio-psychological human organisms) and between home and school (micro-systems).

In the study on Black fathers' participation in ECD, the ecological model is important for two reasons. First, the rationale for its adoption in this study draws from the view of Campos (2008) who notes the importance of multiple context, bio-directional interactions as well as the family and the context in which fatherhood is experientially lived. Second, Morrell (2006) emphasises the importance social context and identity in the construction of fatherhood within the African context. Fatherhood therefore is a socially constructed identity (Morrell 2006) that cannot be studied outside the social context in which it is experientially lived.

OBSERVATIONS

The Current State of Father Participation in South Africa

Father participation is a significant contributing factor in a child's overall developmental needs (Fagan and Iglesias 1999; Mupetesi et al. 2012; Cloete 2014). Research on fatherhood shows that lack of an involved father during childhood has life-long negative impacts on children (Mavungu et al. 2013; Cloete 2014; Miruka and Zonge 2014). Bronfenbrenner (1979b) strongly emphasizes the power of cohesion within the proximal elements. He notes that the child's developmental potentials would be hugely enhanced with the availability of meaningful and functional networks within the proximal elements. For example, a harmonious and supportive cohesion between the home and the school in which both parents work with the school will significantly enhance the academic performance of the child (Coleman 1989; Prashantham and Dhanaraj 2010; Burke et al. 2011; Mohnen et al. 2011; Mupetesi et al. 2012). Therefore, it is still worrisome to suggest that despite a plethora of literature on the benefits of father participation in the early education of their children, Richter et al. (2004) suggest that many children in South Africa still either do not have a biological father or a father figure in their lives.

Studies further suggest that a large percentage of children in South Africa are increasingly growing in homes that appear to be headed by only mothers in single parenthood (Department of Social Development 2006). In cases where fathers appear to be participating, studies indicate that their participation are only limited to certain aspects of the child's lives. Notwithstanding, some fathers are not only involved, but they appear to be very passionate about their children's academic performance and social lives, but lack financial means to ensure children's academic success and social wellbeing (Rabe 2006). Against this background, the current paper shows four main categories of fathers that characterise the current state of Black father participation in South Africa's ECD sector including economic fathers, social fathers, absent fathers as well as teenage fathers.

Economic Fathers

Morel (2006) opines that an economic father is an adult male who plays a role in the daily maintenance of the child. The most fundamental contributions of an economic father include providing shelter, food, clothes and school fees. In cases where a child's paternity is in dispute, mothers have the prerogative to seek the services of the Department of Justice which facilitates

paternity testing through the Department of Health, free of charge. According to the Maintenance Act of South Africa (Department of Justice 1998), every man who is considered a biological father is obligated to contribute financially toward the upbringing of his child or children (Department of Justice 1998). Some fathers do not fulfil this obligation, in which case mothers have the prerogative to approach the magistrate court which will instruct the father's employer to make monthly child maintenance deductions from the absconding father's salary (Department of Justice 1998). This arrangement is more common among separated or divorced parents who live apart from each other. Fathers who take custody of children after separation can also claim maintenance costs from mothers though this is very rare in South Africa. In South Africa, legislation enforces on men the responsibility to contribute financially to the maintenance of the child (Department of Justice 1998).

The negative stereotype in literature that appears to suggest that Black men may not be fully interested in the education of their children (Richter and Morrell 2006) is being challenged. Rabe (2006) indicates that evidence abound to equally support the claim that Black fathers are interested and in fact, they are performing their duties as fathers. Richter et al. (2010: 361) observe that "most working (Black) men are providing financial and social support for children..." whether they are his biological children or not. At the core of African conceptualisation of fatherhood is the view of a father as a protector and provider (Mkhize 2004). Within the African communities, a man's success is equally measured by the man's ability to provide for his family. It is therefore common sense that a man is seen and respected as a man within the African traditional society if he can demonstrate genuine ability to provide and support his immediate and extended family. Therefore, men who cannot provide and sustain the family due mainly because he may be unemployed would simply withdraw from his active involvement in the ECD of his children according to Fagan (1999).

The ecological model advocates the study of the entire ecological system in order to understand a social phenomenon. For more than a century, many Blacks in South Africa, especially men have experienced migration aware from the family in search of employment. This was particularly the case with men who had to leave their families to migrate to the Gauteng gold mining sector in search of employment (Crush 1992). Some visit their families once a year while sending monthly cheques back home to support their families (Rabe 2006). The support these fathers afford their families, against extreme odds, sheds light on the value they attach to their fatherhood responsibilities. In a longitudinal interview Black male mineworkers' conceptualisations of fatherhood by Rabe (2006), the respondents revealed that their most important role in life was providing financial support to their families. In the same vein, some men who were interviewed revealed that their fathers were good to them because they paid school fees. When asked what he remembers about his father, one of the participants in Rabe (2006) study noted that the only thing he could remember about his father was the manner he used to buy foodstuff and clothing for him and his siblings.

Although there have been a lot of derogatory impressions in literature concerning economic fathers who are also referred as *ATM fathers* because of the fact that they provide mainly monetary support, however, it would appear some progress have been recorded as well in other areas of the child's development. Whereas the participation of the economic fathers is crucial to ECD and the general family welfare, the researchers acknowledge that children need emotional support from fathers as well. However, according to Mkhize (2004) emotional support that resonates in the cultural context of Black families in South Africa appears to be entrenched in the connection that mothers have with their children (Mkhize 2004). Notwithstanding, it has to be noted that African men are not known or expected to publicly display affectionate relationship with their children even though this is considered a normal and expected display for the women. In the famous African novel by Chinua Achebe *Things Fall Apart,* Okonkwo despises his father because he is too emotional and weak, other boys even refer to him as *agbala* (woman). That is why Rabe (2006) noted that the participants in her study thought that a major issue in the relationship with their fathers was a lack of emotional attachment, which resultantly impacted on how the participants viewed their own fathers.

Given the above, it would seem that the father's emotional role in the life of his child is as important at the financial support (Palm and Fa-

gan 2008). It is therefore important to encourage fathers to ensure that they spend time with their children in a manner to ensure the nurturing of affectionate relationships with their children. That is why Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that the nature of the interaction between the child and his/her parents appears to predict the developmental outcome for the child. It therefore becomes imperative for those who operate within such environment to be mindful of the quality of the interaction with the child. Research in South Africa should emphasise the need of various means of father participation, in addition to financial support. More research should focus on how fathers can provide emotional and social support, particularly when not residing with their children.

Absent Fathers

The term absent father has at least two meanings. On the one hand, it can mean a father who does not live with his child or children for long periods of time. On the other hand, it can mean a father who is physically present but emotionally absent (Mavungu et al. 2013; Mashiya et al. 2015). It can be deduced that most of the interpretations about the South African Black fathers with regards to their participation in their children's lives are drawn from such conceptualisations.

The phenomenon of the absent fathers among the Black families of South Africa is linked to elements of both micro and macro systems. Elements of the micro-systems include poverty, unemployment and disease while those of the macro-systems may be viewed from the perspectives of the state of the economy as well as how the organisation of the state economy is affecting the migrant labour system. These elements decrease proximal processes that include the amount of time fathers spend while they are with both their biological and other children. Unemployment leads to anger, frustration and hopelessness, which can lead to lack of father participation (Fagan 1999; Wilson 2006; Richter et al. 2010). This in turn makes children avoid spending time with their fathers for fear of appearing provocative (Richter and Morrell 2006).

A father may be physically present but contribute nothing in the form of financial, social and emotional support (Mavungu et al. 2013). Poverty is also a significant contributor to marriage delay and marriage breakdowns in many Black families, with devastating consequences for children (Richter et al. 2010). After divorce, children are often left to the custody of their mothers and fathers struggle to 'gain access' to their children (Richter 2006).

Poverty leads to migrant labour, which after many years continues to be one of the leading causes of father absence in many Black families of South Africa (Crush 1992; Rabe 2006). Migrant labour among Black men is understood to have started in the late 1800's, after gold and diamonds were first discovered in the Gauteng Province. Black men travelled long distances to seek work in the gold and diamond fields, often leaving their families in the villages for more than a year (Rabe 2006). This led to breakdown of bonds husbands had with their wives, fathers with their children and entire families (Barker, 1979). Currently, Black men continue working in the mining sector away from their families and cite providing food and education for their children as the main reason for enduring the hardships of migrant labour (Rabe 2006).

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is among the leading causes of death in South Africa. According to Statistics South Africa (2013) as high as 5.2 million South Africans live with HIV. The death of parents has led the emergence of child-headed homes across the country. HIV/AIDS is a significant contributor to father absence. According to Desmond and Desmond (2006), it is reported to be more prevalent among Black men from predominantly disadvantaged backgrounds than in men from other racial groups. But this scenario appeared to be aggravated by the fact that owing to the apartheid racial segregationist policies, men other than Blacks are neither as economically disadvantaged nor as socially deprived (Desmond and Desmond 2006).

Social Fathers

When a child receives the care and attention of an adult male who is not his/her biological father, the adult male can acquire the status of a social father. Therefore this conception of fatherhood represents a father who performs the same function as the child's biological father even though the adult male does not share any form of biological relationship with the child (Morrell 2006). Social fatherhood is more prevalent among Black South Africans than other types of fatherhood (Morrell 2006). This is part-

ly because in the African perspective discussed earlier, fatherhood is a shared responsibility of males in an extended family. This allows other adult male members of the child's extended family to carry out the functions ordinarily ascribed to that of the biological father especially in the event that the biological father is deceased or out of employment thereby unable to perform his fatherly duties to the child (Mkhize 2004). The other dimension of social fatherhood relates to the mother's connectedness to other men in the community such as male family friends, boyfriends, pastors, teachers, neighbours among others, who might play fatherly roles at given times in a child's life. This is the communal nature in which an African child is raised.

Discussions on male spouses who are not biological fathers but fulfil fatherhood obligations are prevalent in South African fatherhood literature (Richter et al. 2010; Marcisz 2013; Khewu and Adu 2015). There are many reasons why social fatherhood may arise within a particular family. One of those many reasons could be the incident of a divorce or the death of the child's natural/biological father. On the other hand, a need for a social father may have arisen because the child's biological father may have just lost his job or may have fallen ill such that he is not able to cater for the family or may be alive but simply denies paternity of the child (Swartz and Bhana 2009; Richter et al. 2010). The dynamics of the social and biological fatherhood and the apparent lack of father participation, all of which are characteristic of the current status of most families in South Africa has therefore been wildly reported in literature (see for instance, Richter et al. 2010; Richter et al. 2012; Mashego and Taruvinga 2014; Mashiya et al. 2015).

Meanwhile, South Africa does not have documented statistical information regarding how many fathers are involved in these complex patterns of fatherhood (Richter et al. 2012; Izugbara et al. 2014). What is known though is that more than half of Black children do not have daily contact with their fathers (Mavungu et al. 2013). The researchers therefore argue that more research may be needed in order to provide empirical evidence that may help throw more light on the extent of father absenteeism as well as with respect to the number of children affected by this scenario. Moreover, research may also be necessary in order to obtain empirical evidence with respect to the nature of father participation the children may be experiencing. This can assist the government, policy makers, non-profit organisations and other relevant stakeholders in understanding the scope of the problem, planning and in implementing relevant intervention programs.

Teenage Father

The rate of teenage pregnancy is very high in South Africa. This is a serious concern for parents, government, and the broader community. Falling pregnant while still at school has lifelong devastating effects for teenage girls and their offspring (Swartz and Bhana 2009). Immediate consequences include high odds of dropping out of school and health complications. It would appear that researchers tend to focus mainly on girls whenever issues of teenage pregnancy and parenthood present some research agenda (Cunningham and Boult 1996; Koenig-Visagie and van Eeden 2013; Mashego and Taruvinga 2014; Quinn 2014). As a result of this over focusing on teenage girls, researchers appear to pay little or no attention to the roles that boys play in encouraging teenage pregnancy and girl parents.

Studies show that teenage fatherhood is very common among Black communities of South Africa (Swartz and Bhana 2009; Richter et al. 2012; Khewu and Adu 2015; Mashiya et al. 2015). It is also known that there is a socioeconomic dimension to teenage fatherhood. It is mostly teenagers from disadvantaged backgrounds such as villages and townships who become fathers prematurely (Swartz and Bhana 2009). For instance, in the United States Hanson et al. (1989) cited in Morrell (2006) observed a high level of teenage fatherhood working class African-American boys than was the case among their middle class counterparts. Morrell (2006) attributes this discrepancy to the fact that boys from disadvantaged backgrounds hold the notion that success with girls proves manhood or masculinity whereas this might not be the case with middle class boys.

Swartz and Bhana (2009) conducted a study in South Africa where predominantly disadvantaged Black teenage fathers were interviewed on, among other things, the reasons why teenage fathers deny paternity. The participants not-

ed three main reasons: i) the fear of not being able to support the child financially; ii) acknowledging fatherhood could jeopardise chances of education as the teenage father would be forced to quit school and seek work in order to support his child; and, iii) some teenagers might not be sure whether they are the ones who impregnated the girls.

A scenario now presents itself in South Africa in which quite a reasonable number of men in the age brackets of 15 and 54 years may not be aware that they have actually fathered a child (Richter et al. 2010). In addition to this scenario, the researchers were unable to collect data in order to ascertain the percentage of these men are teenagers. Equally significant is the fact that there is dearth of empirical evidence on how many of these fathers are teenagers and this predicament is exacerbated by teenage fathers' tendency to deny paternity (Swartz and Bhana 2009). Consequently, teenage fathers constitute a large portion of 'absent fathers' and the situation offers a huge research agenda. Future research should therefore focus on the causes of teenage fatherhood; why teenagers tend to deny paternity; how to de-escalate teenage fatherhood and what forms of support teenage fathers need to deal with their challenges.

Barriers to Sustained Father Participation in South Africa

Research shows connection between socio-economic backgrounds of fathers and their participation in early childhood development (Richter et al. 2010). From an economic perspective, it is self-evident that Black fathers appear to be struggling with many post-apartheid economic realities in South Africa. As a result, it has been argued that the non or lower participation in the economic spheres of the country mean that most Black fathers are less involved with their children's upbringing compared to White, Indian and Coloured fathers (Desmond and Desmond 2006). During apartheid, the White minority rule instituted policies of political oppression and economic marginalisation against Black people and to a lesser extent, against Indians and Coloureds. This sheds light on current economic and social disparities among the various races of South Africa and how these disparities translate to different levels of father participation in early childhood development.

A large majority of Black children in South Africa are raised by single mothers without the help of an involved father (Department of Education 2006; Khewu and Adu 2015). There is also an ever-growing scenario of child-headed households in which the eldest child takes up the responsibilities of looking after his or her younger siblings (Department of Social Development 2006; Koenig-Visagie and van Eeden 2013; Mashego and Taruvinga 2014). Elements of the micro-macro-systems such as socioeconomic and socio-cultural factors have a negative impact on proximal processes in that they reduce the time children spend with their fathers (Mavungu et al. 2013).

Socio-Cultural Elements of Micro-Macro-Systems on Father Participation

The prevailing view on fathers in South Africa has been that most domestic violence and sexual abuse and other forms of abuse especially against women and children are perpetrated by men themselves (Richter et al. 2004). However, this review has shown that such notions emanate from negative stereotypes and that empirical research shows most fathers have a caring disposition toward children (Richter and Morell 2006). Anecdotal evidence shows that fear of being perceived as potential threats to children prevents some men from participating in early childhood spaces such as day care centres. Hence, for many young people in South Africa the love, care and protection that are associated with the presence of a man in the house are non-existent (Richter et al. 2004). The researchers therefore argue that society's cultural elements of micro and macro-systems such as negative stereotypes about gender and culture can contribute to men's disinterest in early childhood development.

Research (Swartz and Bhana 2009; Richter et al. 2010) show that influences of the macro-system in the form of customary law can have a negative impact on father participation in early childhood development. Unmarried Black fathers in South Africa are expected to fulfil a cultural obligation of paying *intlawulo* (damages) upon impregnating a woman (Richter et al. 2010). Some men cannot afford to pay a hefty *intlawulo* because of unemployment, in which case they might choose not to acknowledge the pregnancy (Richter et al. 2010). Young fathers who are

still at school or university might choose not to acknowledge pregnancy because their parents might force them to quit studies and seek employment in order to pay *intlawulo* and child maintenance, thus jeopardising their chance of ever receiving an education (Swartz and Bhana 2009).

Socio-Economic Elements of Micro-Macro-Systems on Father Participation

Under the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 the apartheid government forced the majority of Black people to live in rural areas known as 'homelands'. Subsequently, many Black men were forced into migrant labour, which resulted in fathers leaving their families for long periods of time, leading to the emergence of disrupted family life (Richter et al. 2010: 361). However, not much has changed since 1951 in terms of the migrant labour system; most Black people still live in townships and rural areas (homelands) that were instituted by the apartheid government as reserves of cheap labour and they still travel to the big cities to sell their labour. The squalid living conditions of Black men in the cities have a dehumanizing effect, which ultimately leads to alcohol abuse and neglect of children (Barker 1970; Rabe 2006; Burke et al. 2011; Mohnen et al. 2011; Mupetesi et al. 2012).

Thus, it has been argued that most Black men are discouraged from participating in the ECD of their children by either lack of job or lack of the economic sustenance with which to cater for the child. Richter et al. (2010), observed that many South African men in this situation appear to grapple with more psychosocial issues than one while some of them prefer to avoid their children entirely when they thought the shame was unbearable. A similar case can be observed in the study of American fathers from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds who became less involved in parenting after they lost their jobs (Fagan 1999; Burke et al. 2011).

DISCUSSION

A growing interest in fatherhood research focuses on strategies to encourage father participation in ECD (Fagan 1999; Fagan and Iglesias 1999; Fletcher 2008). However, most of this research is conducted in overseas contexts. Local literature shows no significant scale of implemented intervention programs to encourage father participation in early childhood development like those in the United States. Research on the common experience of political oppression and economic marginalization of African Americans and the Black people of South Africa shows similar effects on their social realities and parental involvement patterns (Ngobeni 2006).

Palm and Fagan (2008) suggest that one way to encourage the father-child relationship is for mothers themselves to openly show support for such relationship. Such approach will ensure that the father has access to his child. Empirical research on some US fathers by Turbiville and Marquis (2001) appears to suggest that the willingness among fathers to participate in activities and programs that involve their children is growing more than ever before. Dyer et al. (2011) suggest that mothers should be encouraged to support fathers in adopting a holistic approach to parenting as contrasted with paying child maintenance only.

In the study of absent fathers in Johannesburg (Mavungu et al. 2013), the researchers used focus groups as the main data collection method from thirty-four participants who were considered absent fathers. To reiterate, the main objective of the study leading to this paper was to uncover the causes of absent fatherhood and propose recommendations about strategies to encourage father participation from the perspectives of the participants. However, the researchers reckon that they obtained only qualitative data. As a result, more research will be needed in order to understand further why Black fathers become absent in their children's lives. This is because at the moment there appear to be a lack of contextually grounded theoretical frameworks and coherent methodologies in studying and measuring father participation.

CONCLUSION

This literature review shows that more than ever before Black fathers appear to be getting involved and also appear to be getting more interested in the lives of their children. Although this scenario may not be high enough given that majority of children still do not experience effective functional father participation in their lives. Notwithstanding, most research on Black fathers tend to operate from a deficit model with more

focus on what is lacking rather than what is present. Consequently, South African fatherhood research is silent on the phenomenon of 'new fatherhood' in which men increasingly occupy spaces and play parental roles traditionally attributed to women. More research is needed on the emotional and psychological dimensions of father participation. This literature review shows that unfavourable historical and current socioeconomic conditions and cultural barriers impact on the ability of Black fathers to participate in the early childhood development of their children. Policies that address economic and social imbalances can improve father participation in early childhood development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the above discussions, a number of recommendations have been suggested as follows:

The researchers suggest the need to deconstruct the notion of active fathers as only those adult males who are capable of financially or materially providing for the economic sustenance of the children and the rest of the family. Instead emphasis should be placed on fatherhood conceptualisation in which the father is able to cater for the child's cognitive, affective, nurturing, caring needs.

At the moment, there appear to be too much emphasis on the wellness of women while men's appear to be receiving little or no attention. As a result the researchers would like to suggest that spaces should be created where men can be provided with the opportunity to share their experiences with each other. These opportunities may be in the form of men ministry, men's conferences, workshops, social evenings, and tours. In addition, such spaces should provide men with skills to facilitate open, honest and healthy communication with the mothers of their children and other family members. Government needs to ensure that support groups are available to men in order to assist in motivating men and fathers as well as providing counselling services to men in need.

Explore alternative means of providing maintenance. For example, men work are not in employment should be encourage to assume the role of 'house men' who keep the house while their partners are at work. This recommendation appears to be in line with the gender equality campaign. Researchers suggest that men who are unable to pay maintenance should be encouraged to provide maintenance in kind through the use of their time or skills.

Lastly, increase access to counselling services. Researchers suggest that counselling services should be available to all parents whether they are in a relationship or not, in order to assist with relationship problems and challenges.

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